

STENHOUSE

Continued from page 10

The nose of Allmendinger's car launched Elliott's into the air, and his car landed on the hood of Joey Logano's Ford. Among the contending cars also damaged in the wreck were those of

Kevin Harvick, Brad Keselowski, Martin Truex Jr., Matt Kenseth, Trevor Bayne and Erik Jones.

After a red flag of 26 minutes, 51 seconds to clean up the wreckage, Kyle Busch led the field to green on Lap 174 with JGR teammate Denny Hamlin beside him and Dale Jr. running third.

Dale Jr. quickly fell off the pace because of a loose left rear wheel and



LATE RACE BIG ONE

drove slowly back to pit road, losing a lap in the process. But when Landon Cassill lost power and stalled near the inside wall short of pit road on Lap 179, NASCAR called the seventh caution, and Dale Jr. had his lap back as the "lucky dog."

But Earnhardt was mired in traffic after the restart and could make up no ground after the caution that forced the overtime. He finished 22nd in his final spring race at NASCAR's largest oval track.

Aric Almirola, who won the NASCAR XFINITY Series race, capped an excellent weekend with a fourth-place finish. Kasey Kahne ran fifth, followed by Daytona 500 winner Kurt Busch and Keselowski, who recovered from the "Big One" to secure seventh place.

Stenhouse is the 11th first-time winner at Talladega. Also it has been since 2007 that the pole winner won the race at Tal-



REASON TO CELEBRATE

ladega.

Visit <http://www.talladegasuperspeedway.com/> for information the Fall, Alabama 500 race on October 15th race.



FAMILY MOMENT

Dale Jr. to Retire at the End of the Season

Story: Phillip Prichard/Photo: MSA Archives

NASCAR's Most Popular Driver Dale Earnhardt Jr. announced his retirement from the Monster Energy NASCAR Cup Series after the 2017 season on April 25th, saying that he wanted to leave stock-car racing competition on his own terms. But his words also struck a tone of optimism, that his involvement with the sport would remain strong.

It was a decision not easily reached and a day that was "bittersweet," but one that he indicated brought a certain degree of peace.

"I accomplished way more than I ever dreamed, way more than I ever thought I'd accomplish," Earnhardt said. "So I'm good, you know. I'm good on that front. I'm so blessed and fortunate on what I was able to achieve but I'm very sad because it's definitely disappointing for a lot of people (fans) to receive the news."

Earnhardt, 42, was sidelined from NASCAR's top series for the final 18 races last season after a concussion and lingering symptoms. Through his rehabilitation process, Earnhardt has become a vocal advocate for research of sports-related brain injuries.

But his stint away from the drivers' seat, he said, also gave him the benefit of time "to understand what's important to me, time to realize the incredible support system I have in my wife, my team and my doctors, and time to work like hell to wrestle back some semblance of say-so in this whole matter."

The 14-time Most Popular Driver has won 26 times in 603 starts over a career that began at age 24 in 1999. Among his accomplishments are two Daytona 500 crowns (2004, 2014) and two championships (1998, 1999) in what is now called the NASCAR XFINITY Series.

Earnhardt began his premier-series career on May 30, 1999 at Charlotte Motor Speedway with a 16th-place finish in the Coca-Cola 600. That step in his NASCAR career came after years of driving Late Models at the weekly and touring level before making his mark in the XFINITY tour.

Earnhardt's most prolific year with DEI was a six-win season in 2004 that included his first Daytona 500 victory. By then, he had exhibited a mastery on the sport's biggest and fastest ovals, winning six times at Talladega Superspeedway, including a four-race win streak that stretched from 2001-03.

Earnhardt is now in his 10th season driving for Hendrick Motorsports, a span that has flowed with both triumph and setbacks. After winning at Michigan International Speedway in his first year with the team, he went four seasons before winning again -- also at Michigan.

Earnhardt admires the history of NASCAR racing and he says the stars of the sport have always spanned different generations. During his press conference at Hendrick Motorsports, he beat the drum for several of NASCAR's younger drivers - Kyle Larson and Chase Elliott. Jr. stated that all he read on Twitter was how awesome the Bristol race was and how much fun it is to watch Larson, and it's true. He's a real talent. "Larson is cool as a cucumber. He is easy to talk to and is marketable," Earnhardt said. "Chase is the same way. Chase is so easy and approachable. That's what you've got to be. These guys are effortless at it. So once they start to pick it up and understand the power of what they have at their fingertips, the sky's the limit for NASCAR. I'm super excited about their future."

While Earnhardt's NASCAR Cup Series career will be coming to a close at the end



of this year, he will continue to race. Earnhardt revealed he still has two NASCAR XFINITY Series races on his schedule next year and he added he wouldn't mind running a short-track race or two, particularly at Hickory (N.C.) Motor Speedway, when his schedule allowed.

Earnhardt joins Carl Edwards, Tony Stewart and Jeff Gordon as recent retirees from NASCAR's premier series.

The fans and NASCAR will miss Jr.